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Rosa Aiello, Being as Glass Eel (Marble), 2014
[courtesy of the artist]
ALIEN SHE
Vox Populi, Philadelphia

"She is me, I am her" is the refrain of Riot Grrrl band Bikini Kill's "Alien She," performed raw and off-tempo by Kathleen Hanna on the 1993 album Pussy Whipped. Borrowing this song's title, the first exhibition to work through Riot Grrrl's legacy is curated by Astrid Suparak and Ceci Moss, who came of age in Los Angeles and the Bay Area (respectively) during the punk feminist movement's 90s heyday. In the exhibition text, Suparak and Moss explain that Bikini Kill's anti-anthem treads an "uneasy line between feminist critique and collectivity," a description that applies equally to this show. Alien She kicked off in 2013 at Carnegie Mellon University's Miller Gallery and will travel to San Francisco, Newport Beach, CA, and Portland, OR, through 2015; Vox Populi's more than 25-year history of collective organization makes it an ideal space to host the show's Philadelphia iteration (March 7-April 27, 2014).

In the gallery's reception area, hundreds of photocopied zines, posters, and distribution catalogues dated 1991-2013 sit neatly on tall plywood shelves and inside wide vitrines. The materials are on loan from individuals or from the Riot Grrrl Collection, held at New York University's Fales Library—also home to Hanna's personal papers. Perspex sheets protect such DIY publications as Blockhead, Chainsaw, and Catalyst, making their covers visible, but also preventing visitors from leafing through them. In this way, the presentation celebrates the movement's prolific production and strong distribution networks, while highlighting the problematic nature of preserving a living, growing, and ephemeral archive by taking these documents out of circulation.

Each of Vox Populi's divided gallery spaces contains a solo micro-exhibition by an artist informed by Riot Grrrl. Activist, filmmaker, and curator Faythe Levine's segment features publications and production shots from two projects documenting the resurgence of handmade practices—such as knitting or sign painting—and considers their value. Tammy Rae Carland's photographic series, Archive of Feelings (2008), includes grids of mixtapes, postcards, and playlists; among its featured works is Vaguely Dedicated (2008) a grid of feminist book dedications that identify and emotionally connect a diverse community of women, from mothers to "the oppressed." The photographs propose an approach to Alien She's archive as a chronicle of precisely those connections.

The exhibition avoids cozy nostalgia, despite such inclusions as Miranda July's Love Diamond (1998-2000), in which the artist's lo-fi performance simulates drowning in an ocean of blue light, or an MP3 of Ginger Brooks Takahashi's band, The Ballet, performing the synthsy, upbeat I Hate the War (2006). Instead, Alien She questions the commodification and institutionalization of radicalism. For example, Stephanie Syjuco's The Counterfeit Crochet Project (Critique of a Political Economy) (2006-ongoing), consisting of knitted knockoffs of Chanel bags and Burberry scarves, is shown alongside rows of bootlegged album covers and, on two walls, black-and-white printed posters that present tear-off hyperlinks to PDFs of canonical texts on art and public life. By including the latter piece—titled FREE TEXTS (2011-2012, updated 2013)—Syjuco juxtaposes aesthetic and political theory with brightly colored high fashion and pop music references. In this context, FREE TEXTS provides a useful, if transgressive, distribution service, but also a critique of elite consumerism compelled by the writings of academic and art world "celebrity" theorists, from Deleuze and Guattari to Brad Troemel.

In addition to its ambitious mix of artists, archival materials, collaborative platforms, and contributions from regional music curators out of California, Brazil, Belgium, and elsewhere, Alien She has a generous programmatic reach, including a zine-making class, a self-defense workshop, panel discussions, and burlesque and karaoke performances taking place around Philadelphia. The show's digital component includes free, downloadable resources on feminism and race at bit.ly/AlienShe as well as a map-in-progress charting current Riot Grrrl chapters at bit.ly/RGmap. Through this broad focus on community, channeled and multiplied through a diversity of accessible communicative media, Alien She asserts that Riot Grrrl's power is very much in the present.

—Becky Huff Hunter

ABOVE: Stephanie Syjuco, The Counterfeit Crochet Project (Critique of a Political Economy), 2006-ongoing, yarn, downloadable PDF instructional guide for creating knockoff logos; FREE TEXTS, 2011-2012 (updated 2013), free downloadable PDF files of texts found online and tear-off tab flyers [courtesy of the artist and Catharine Clark Gallery, San Francisco]